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ABSTRACT

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MINNESOTA'S COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION

A Case-Study of State
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A paper presented at the CODFISH meeting held at
the annual conference of the National Association
for Foreign Student Affairs in Albuquerque, N.M.
on May 27, 1974.

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SUMMARY

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The passage of this bill required a large effort which combined resources of U.S. and foreign students, faculties and administrations, the community (representing varied cultural, political, and economic interests), and both political parties in the State Legislature. Significant educational groups in the State government were also involved in the passage of this bill.

While this experience may be unique for Minnesota and its present political climate, there are features in it which may be of interest to others who are seeking state legislation to remedy the present plight of international education.

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BACKGROUND OF THE BILL

The major precipitating factor in our effort to seek State legislation favorable to foreign students was increasing cost of education and living. Beginning with increases of tuition in 1968 these fees doubled in four years. Each time a tuition increase was announced, foreign students had to raise additional funds just to meet the new demands. For example, increases in 1973 created a demand for \$265,000 in new funds; a new tuition hike just announced calls for \$145,000 in new resources. No new scholarship funds have been requested by the administration, however, in spite of repeated reports, memos, and one major All-University Committee report. Simultaneously, the rush on loans mounted because only extremely limited scholarship funds were available. In just one year outstanding loans among foreign students doubled and reached a total of a half million dollars of indebtedness. Unfortunately, the earning potential of foreign students decreased due to tightening of Immigration regulations on employment.

Significant local groups and agencies, especially the International Student Adviser's Office, the Minnesota International Student Association, and the Minnesota International Center, have held several meetings, teach-ins and joint retreats to consider the worsening situation. One of such meetings, held in the presence of a few members of the University Regents, resulted in recognition of the problems which the University felt it had in dealing with the State Legislature. It appeared that a solution to our problems would have to come from this body, as well as from the University community.

A bill mandating complete waivers of tuition for foreign students at the University of Minnesota, not exceeding one percent of enrollment, had been introduced in the previous Legislature, but this bill failed. It had no chance of passage because the Regents had already stated they would not implement a bill calling for complete tuition waivers, and rural legislators would not have supported a bill helping only the University of Minnesota. A series of preliminary consultations in early January, 1973, when the new Legislature convened, suggested that the atmosphere for limited financial assistance for foreign students may be favorable, and that the foreign students and the local community will back such efforts. After extensive additional consultations with University officials, representatives of State colleges, student and community groups, selected legislators, faculty experts knowledgeable with the political process, and key local individuals, a full-fledged campaign was undertaken to push for legislation which would grant some financial aids for foreign students in all State institutions of higher education.

PRINCIPLES EMBODIED IN THE BILL

Not all at once, and not always with the greatest of ease, several operational principles emerged:

1. "GO PUBLIC" IS NECESSARY:

In spite of danger that publicity may attract opposition, and that failure

of the bill may have serious consequences, the decision to "go public" was made as the only alternative to inaction. It was felt that the public in general, and decision-making public especially, was unaware of the special problems facing international education. If full impact of these factors was understood, we reasoned, the Minnesota public would support a modest program of support. Even if the situation was so critical that no support was possible, we felt we needed to know where we stood. Early predictions of success of this campaign were largely negative and the prognosis sceptical.

2. MIDDLE KEY VISIBILITY:

While the activists wanted a massive campaign, complete with sit-ins and demonstrations, the conservatives would have preferred a very low key campaign, preferably without visibility. Our strategy finally agreed upon called for some visibility, but no "over-kill." Similarly, our lobbying efforts needed to be substantially different from those of established groups with regular legislative activities. The bill became a focus of an educational campaign, designed to educate the Legislature and the public to the special ramifications of educational exchanges, and to afford an opportunity to foreign and American students to participate in the political process. As it turned out, the latter lesson was more meaningful to all of us than we anticipated.

3. ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST:

In spite of strong and recurring tendencies to stress the financial plight of foreign students and focus on their problems, the only justifiable grounds on which financial support appeared likely were the benefits available to Minnesotans from the presence of foreign students. The members of the Legislature are very strongly committed to their constituencies, that expected fairly precise and tangible evidence of such benefits, not just references to better international relationships or "brotherhood of mankind." Arguments which appeared to establish such benefits included the benefits of reciprocity between foreign students coming here and U.S. students going overseas (especially since Minnesota was then in the process of negotiating a reciprocity agreement on residency status with Wisconsin), evidence of funds brought by foreign students into the State, link between the international operations of local companies in the countries from which foreign students come, and link between the presence of foreign students and the general economic development of the State.

4. REASONABLE REQUESTS WITH A DOLLAR-TAG:

At a time when the State Legislature was turning down funding bills, small and large, it was necessary to state our funding needs in terms which were reasonable, but which included some appropriations as a way of committing the State to this program. The danger was that the Legislature may have passed a "motherhood" bill, granting authority to waive tuition, but expecting the institutions of higher education to fund it from internal sources. This is to some extent what happened with the tuition-waiver scholarships; however, a specific appropriation was also passed for emergency scholarships, and the way was paved for submission of regular

legislative budget requests to implement the needs of this legislation in the future.

An agreement on what should be a reasonable amount of funds requested was not easy to obtain. On the one extreme were activists seeking to abolish tuition altogether, and on the other were cautious voices not to ask for anything beyond a proclamation of support for international education on the ground that too much pressure for funds would antagonize legislators, University administrators, and taxpayers. Because of these differences on what was "reasonable," the draft of the bill was revised several times (always downward) until the present version emerged as a working compromise. These delays almost proved costly. As a result, we missed the opportunity to pass the bill during the first session of the Legislature and had to wait for the second session, thus losing enthusiasm of supporters and the momentum in the Legislature.

5. INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS:

The initial lobbying effort revealed unexpectedly that significant numbers of legislators had previous pleasant and rewarding experiences with foreign students, visitors, or people in other countries. These legislators, many of whom attended the University of Minnesota during the hey-years of international programs, had no difficulties accepting the principles of the bill and need for funding. They, and the foreign students they knew personally many years earlier, helped us enlarge the concept of enlightened self-interest into the idea of the "cultural mix" on our campuses--hence, the formula in the bill which established benefits for foreign students in relationship to the total student population. This interpersonal nature of our experience is not to be underestimated. The efforts which foreign students make to reach out to Americans today, and the efforts which our community groups make toward this goal, are like a savings account for international education. Years later, as it was true in our experience today, these friendly contacts will affect future legislators, or their influential constituents.

6. KNOW YOUR FACTS:

Many legislators had extensive prior knowledge of international and educational affairs. Similarly, groups whose support for the bill was needed (e.g., AAUP, local corporations, labor groups, service clubs) required sophisticated answers to sophisticated questions. It was fortunate that we could produce several documents, all of which proved exceptionally helpful in the lobbying effort, related to the cost of education, attitudes toward foreign students, and interests of the foreign students. Some of these documents were produced directly for this purpose by us, others were prepared by others for various purposes: study of comparison of expenditure patterns between entering foreign and American students, a study of attitudes of graduate directors toward foreign students, student opinion poll about relations between American and foreign students, analysis of financial aid applications, annual international interest survey of both foreign and U.S. students, and two attitude and satisfaction studies of foreign students toward their educational and social experiences

here. These studies and documents provided not only data we needed, but also tools for training and education of those who participated in the lobbying effort.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The community sponsor of the bill and the group primarily responsible for the organization of the campaign was the Minnesota International Center. This group provided the initial impetus for the effort, sent its officers testifying convincingly before various committees of both houses of the Legislature, mobilized its board and membership continually through its Newsletter, and appropriated limited funds for organizational expenditures. MIC reached some influential legislators of both parties, and organized a very successful letter-writing campaign through local constituents of its widely distributed members. It is estimated that this campaign was responsible for approximately one half of some 3,500 letters which had been written during the course of the legislative session. The rest of these letters were mailed through letter-writing campaigns of the students, American and foreign, organized through MISA and other community organizations and individuals not formally affiliated with MIC.

In spite of its organizational commitment to the bill, MIC faced some problems which made it difficult to produce a more massive campaign than was actually waged. Of the most active community volunteers, more came from other groups than MIC. Similarly, MIC was unable to obtain organizational endorsement from its member organizations, especially church groups, service clubs, civic associations, and local industries. On the other hand, individual members of these groups carried a major burden in telephoning, writing, and personally visiting members of the Legislature. Among them were prominent members with political connections and representatives of two of the most important local industries.

The most significant community support outside of MIC came from labor organizations, especially a few independent labor groups, Junior Chamber of Commerce, minority educators, the Pillsbury Company, a local scholarship raising organization with influential membership, and two political organizations: Americans for Democratic Action and the Rippon Society. Support of these groups was essential in reaching legislators who could not be reached through a normal course of lobbying.

The success of this bill would not have been possible without the major work of the Minnesota International Center. Yet there were problems which should be overcome in order to improve the functioning of future legislative efforts on behalf of international education. The first problem is the perennial problem of tax exempt organizations, involving themselves in political action. The second problem is the sheer size of the effort which must, by necessity, involve many other community groups not traditionally associated with foreign student work. A closer integration of these efforts is needed with wider community resource on an on-going basis. The third problem is the relative difficulty in working together between community groups, foreign student organizations, and the colleges and universities. In these cooperative efforts community groups often

find themselves pushed into the background. Finally, the last problem is one of follow-up with the contacts which have been made during the lobbying for the bill.

While it is true that the bill would not have been possible without the Minnesota International Center, it is equally true that the massive education which resulted from the campaign brought significant benefits to MIC in return for its work.

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

The University community has more resources than is usually recognized. Faculty members knowledgeable with the political process have given invaluable assistance with the formulation of objectives, writing of the bill, and outlining of strategy. When problems arose in connection with labor support, faculty members from relevant departments helped with referrals, analyses, and recommendations. Organizational and individual support was provided by the University Federation of Teachers and the local, as well as state, chapter of the American Association of University Professors whose lobbyists supported the bill independently. Major University committees, especially the Committee on Foreign Students and the Advisory Council on International Programs, supported the principles of the bill. The Office of Student Affairs, to whom our office reports, backed the efforts consistently.

Official University endorsement was, however, difficult to obtain for several reasons. First, the University had no prior official policy on international students other than administrative pronouncements. Secondly, foreign students were not a part of its legislative priority program. Finally, the bill provided benefits for the entire educational system of Minnesota, not just the University. These and other reasons connected with pending scholarship legislation, tuition waivers for Veterans, and reciprocity with Wisconsin, complicated matters sufficiently that a committee of the Regents could consider the bill only briefly. It endorsed the principles of the legislation, provided that funding will be granted by the Legislature. Unfortunately, the University did not request funds for immediate implementation. These funds have now been included in the legislative requests for the coming biennium. Officially, the University maintained a policy of insistence that non-resident tuition waivers would deprive it of its income, and if implemented, tuition increases for all students may result. A bill merely authorizing waivers¹ was regarded as no favor to the University, if the funding had to come from internal sources which happened to be already heavily taxed.

In order to overcome these problems of University attitude toward foreign students, a new policy has now been voted by the University Senate which includes the creation of an All-University Council on International Education². Charges to this Council include an evaluation of needs of

¹The Regents already have this authority, although the State colleges did not.

²We have attempted to work on such policy simultaneously with the support for the legislation.

foreign students. Similarly, we are attempting to solicit the assistance of economists in order to determine the actual cost of foreign student education at the University of Minnesota.

The State colleges and the community college system have, after initial indecision, supported the "foreign student bill" enthusiastically. Several Presidents of the State colleges have made themselves available for testifying and lobbying for the bill. Both of these systems are in the process of implementing this bill, especially the non-resident tuition waiver, in spite of the fact that no funds have been appropriated for this purpose. The Foreign Student Advisers in the State colleges have, of course, been most active supporters and successful lobbyists.

The private colleges have been included in the bill only as an afterthought. Initially, the bill intended to cover only State-supported institutions; however, the section dealing with emergency scholarships, not tied down to tuition costs, was amended in committees to satisfy the concerns of the legislators for the welfare of foreign students in these colleges and to satisfy the lobbyists for the private colleges.

Individually, the faculty provided only a limited support to the bill. Perhaps no more than a dozen faculty members lobbied us, and a handful of others provided counseling and advisory assistance. They had their own problems and could perhaps not be expected to make support for foreign students their primary activity. Institutionally, they have spoken strongly, however, and have given the support when it was most needed. Their present support was most appreciated and will be essential in the future. The bill became a rallying point, an issue, to which they can argue and react. Through it, they appeared to have expressed themselves also on related issues, such as the brain drain, the importance of the cultural mix, and the need for reciprocity of study abroad for our own students.

STUDENT SUPPORT

The Minnesota International Student Association was a very significant force in the passage of this legislation. It provided funds for administrative and printing costs, student-staff support, and coordination of activities resulting in the mobilization of student governments and their lobbyists from the University and the State colleges. Approximately 25 foreign students and 15 U.S. students have become the hard-core lobbyists, while another 25 foreign students and a score of U.S. students have lobbied occasionally. MISA established a "Financial Crisis Committee" which was charged with the responsibility for coordinating these efforts. This Committee lasted through two administrations of MISA, not without problems of continuity, and is still in existence, ready for follow-up to the bill. This Committee, in addition to providing excellent lobbying support, was responsible for several innovative approaches to legislative activity: it sponsored a training workshop for its lobbyists; it organized an innovative and highly successful letter-writing campaign; it instigated some 700 petitions from Winona State College; and it held a successful Teach-In which became a motivating factor at early stages of the work.

Both foreign and U.S. students not only contributed to the passage of the bill, but they also gained an invaluable experience with a system which appeared to be responsive, participated meaningfully in our political process, and obtained a realistic testing ground of the position of foreign students which is often missing due to complex cultural and psychological factors.

In addition to MISA, the most significant student group which has made a contribution beyond its scope has been the Council of Graduate Students at the University of Minnesota. This group provided an early endorsement of the bill, established its own machinery for dealing with special international educational matters, supported the efforts with University administration, and furnished a highly sophisticated group of lobbyists.

Although not organized, the general student body of the University gave a substantial support to the ideas implicit in the legislation. A Student Life Studies Report from 1971 indicated that 40% of entering freshmen were in touch with students from other cultures during their first quarter at the University, and that this contact was regarded by them as sixth among 40 important experiences they had at the University. A subsequent student opinion poll conducted to coincide with our legislative effort in November, 1973, indicated that 67% of the respondents favored maintaining the numbers of foreign students and favored allowing foreign students employment privileges without current restrictions. A majority also felt that foreign students made a valuable contribution to the overall educational experiences of U.S. students, and either have, or sought to increase, personal contacts with these foreign students.

The participation of students, U.S. and foreign, proved to be an exceptionally significant asset of the campaign. Although there were problems of "administrative domination" of students, problems of continuity of student leadership, problems of focusing on foreign student needs versus needs of Americans to have them here, and problems of substantial time commitment of busy students in the lobbying effort, these problems have not adversely affected the passage of the bill. Their participation in the lobbying has been noticed at the University of Minnesota, and if students will become a part of a general lobbying activity of this University, it may be in part a by-product of our legislative experiences and involvement of students in them.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

As might be expected from an undertaking of this magnitude and longitude, there were problems which arose from time to time. The purpose of this discussion is to identify two special problems which might be of general interest. Others were perhaps unique to Minnesota's political scene, the sudden ascendancy of the Democratic party to power after many years of Republican rule, the need to obtain Labor support, and the necessity to maintain a bi-partisan approach in a one-party dominated state government.

One of these more general problems was the consequence of "going public." Not only did this decision create the potential for an organized opposition, but it also exposed us to the possibility of losing friends. From the

beginning of our activity we had been advised--an advice worth heeding--that we should spend all the time needed to identify potential opposition, reach it with our story, and above all show evidence of sympathy for the reasons for the opposition to the bill. On a more subtle level the decision to go public created no open opposition, but various degrees of hostility to our activities. There is no hiding the fact that some University administrators, faculty, student leaders, and community people, including MIC supporters, disapproved of the legislative campaign, disliked some provisions of the bill, and opposed our effort to get state funds for foreign students as inappropriate. Although many persons who became familiar with our story eventually changed their initial scepticism or at least gained an appreciation for our problems, others have considered us and our cause unpopular. Losing friends as a result of legislative activity is understandable, especially among educational institutions in which we had, in effect, created problems for the regular on-going lobbying program, exposed problems associated with granting of residency status for other groups, and indirectly questioned the logic (or lack of it) of assessing tuition charges. Sponsors of legislation of this kind are likely to face similar problems of relationships to which they should be sensitive. It is helpful to maintain all channels of communications open in an effort not to offend others by actions taken by enthusiastic supporters of the bill, or by inaction which may reflect poorly on others.

The second most significant problem is one which is even more difficult to cope with than the first. We are a minority interest and represent a minority "clientele," whether they be foreign students or internationally minded U.S. students. This double minority status has important psychological implications which many of us may not be willing to accept. In order to gain support for our position, we seek endorsement of others, individuals and groups, and often expect a more active part on their side. Actually when it comes to the real hard work, we are on our own, and have to accept the facts that others would support us only if this support does not interfere with their more important activities. We have been often impatient with our friends and colleagues when they have not given our cause their priority. Similarly, foreign students were often critical of University and community people for not being aggressive enough. In fact, the support, as numerous as it was, was nowhere as thunderous as we may have wishfully expected. The students themselves had to place their priorities on the classroom and exams instead of meetings at the Legislature.

This status can be handled if certain assumptions about the psychology of minority situations are kept in mind. First of all, our requests should not appear to be "demanding," and should be related to the needs of those whose support is sought. Secondly, we should avoid being righteous about our "good" cause, and should encourage others to express themselves freely about any anxieties or hesitations they may have with this cause. Our requests should not be "excessive" in the minds of others who might thus feel that we lack sensitivity to others. Finally, we would not get farther with attitudes of cooperativeness, humbleness and positive thinking. For foreign students there is an added problem of knowing how to handle questions regarding their experiences in this country, their attitude toward the United States, and their attitude toward the responsibility of

the State for their welfare. A subtler dimension of this same problem is to know what attitudes the foreign students are to convey about themselves, and their future role upon return to their home country. We have detected some evidence that "elitist" views about foreign students have been often reinforced or perpetuated unknowingly and unintentionally.

CONCLUSION

Before our legislative campaign started, most of us thought of ourselves as reasonably knowledgeable with the State political process which we often interpreted to our foreign students and scholars, and in which we often participated in support of local candidates. As it turned out, we proved to be very inexperienced, at times naive, and often outright mistaken about the conduct of legislative business. It is for this reason that we had to pause from time to time to assess the activity, re-examine our strategy, and ascertain our goals. Out of this reasoned experience come several conclusions worth considering.

First, our basic assumptions about "going public" have proved correct: if legislative leaders and the taxpayers understood fully the nature of our problem, they would support us, even if it costs money, provided we do not seek or demand a first-line commitment and too high a price.

Secondly, the support, if mobilized in many states, may lead to demands for new and different level of support from the Federal Government, such as grant-in-aid programs for the states or changes in federal legislation affecting the status of foreign students and scholars.

Thirdly, the content of the State legislation, on which we spent disproportionate time and by which we tend to measure the effectiveness of these bills, do not matter as much as we think. We worried excessively about how much to ask for, how many compromises to make, or what administrative provisions to seek. As long as the proposed bill tells a comprehensive story of international education, the bill is as much a method of financial aid as it is a focus of a massive educational out-reach program which we have regretfully avoided in the past. The time has come to reverse this pattern. One aspect of professionalism, often discussed in sociological literature on that subject, is professional autonomy, usually associated with ability of a professional group to have its point of view represented in the public. It appears that it would be a sign of growing professionalism if we accepted increasing responsibilities for public policy of our profession.

Fourth, students and community groups are both urgently needed in legislative efforts, but both, like we were initially unprepared for these tasks. The questions are: Are foreign student organizations and community groups willing to equip themselves for the tasks which are more serious than a typical "student activity" or a typical "community group" activity? It is possible to expect that involvement of initially inexperienced people will lead to learning which will in turn generate need for even more education, thus raising the status of the entire profession, of foreign student

education, and of community programs. Our experience indicates that the legislative activity had a profound educational impact on all of us, as if we participated in a graduate level laboratory in international relations.

Personal note: Pressure of time prevented me from circulating the draft of this paper to others who have participated in the legislative activity. For this reason, these remarks should be regarded as personal opinions, based on an honest recollection of happenings, but possibly reflecting perspectives and interpretations which others may not share.